

A Family Bond Across Two Ratings

U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

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In 2006, as a newly enlisted sailor, Zachary Newcomb asked his maternal grandfather what was in the locked wooden boxes that newly selected Navy chiefs carried. His grandfather, a retired Master Chief Petty Officer in the Hospital Corps replied, “I guess you’re going to have to make Chief if you really want to know.”

MAC Zachary Newcomb is one of the select non-medical enlisted sailors attached to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) in Falls Church, Virginia. As the sole Master-at-Arms, Newcomb is BUMED’s subject-matter-expert for critical infrastructure protection, continuity of operations, and force protection, and oversees the implementation and management of the core pillars of security operations –antiterrorism, law enforcement, and physical security throughout the Navy Medicine. It is a role he credits to his maternal grandfather.



Growing up in Suffolk, Virginia, Newcomb looked up to his grandfather and admired the role he played in the Navy. “I was always interested in my grandfather’s career,” said Newcomb. “I spent a lot of my childhood with my grandfather and saw the sacrifice he made to our country. And I wanted to continue his naval legacy—to honor him, his sacrifice, and to serve our nation.”

Paul Thomas Bishop is a fitting name for Newcomb’s grandfather. The Carlisle, Kentucky-native had originally studied at the seminary to become a priest, but left at the outbreak of World War II to enlist in the Navy. After boot camp and Hospital Corps School, Bishop deployed to the Pacific with the 75th Naval Construction Battalion (SeaBees) taking part in combat operations on Guadalcanal, Bougainville, New Guinea and New Georgia as well as supporting the construction of strategic airfields and torpedo boat bases.

“I remember him saying the combat was terrible,” said Newcomb. “The Japanese were a formidable enemy, and he was lucky to have made it through the war alive. He would always thank God for his many blessings for his safety and allowing him to help those he could.”

After the war, Bishop graduated Navy Pharmacy Technician “C” School, and served as an Independent Duty Corpsman aboard the Buckley-class destroyer USS Coolbaugh (DE-217) before becoming an instructor at the Pharmacy Technician School in Portsmouth, Virginia. In 1959, Bishop was promoted to Senior Chief as part of the third class of hospital corpsmen to reach this grade. And only two years later, Bishop was promoted to Master Chief Petty Officer. He retired in 1966.

According to Newcomb, Bishop loved being able to serve in positions where he could help others, whether by providing medical aid or by mentoring junior sailors. And Bishop was thrilled to see his grandson follow in his Navy footsteps, albeit as a Master at Arms.

Newcomb acknowledges it is this same desire to help others that led him to pursue the field of law enforcement.

“Law Enforcement interested me because I saw it as one of the best ways to help people,” said Newcomb. “I have always viewed my position in this trade as being at the best level to help those in need. Many times, I have been

the first on-scene before emergency services, or I have worked closely with them to provide safety to those that were injured.”

Over the last 17 years, Newcomb has carried this outlook across the globe while serving at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Ft. Story, Naval Support Activity Bahrain, Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, aboard USS George H.W. Bush (CVN-77) and USNS Comfort (T-AH-20).

Although Bishop died in 2008, Newcomb knows he would have been overjoyed to know he made chief in October 2022, and finally discovered what was in the Chief’s Vessel.

“Even though he passed years ago I know he would be proud that I was able to figure out what the wooden vessel was all about,” said Newcomb